WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Donate

DONATE | NEWS | SPORTS | EVENTS | FEATURES | OPINION | NEWSLETTER | CONTACT | ABOUT

FEATURES

Winchester Community Music School set to expand, upgrade

TAVISHI CHATTOPADHYAY | CORRESPONDENT

February 26, 2026 . 6:00 AM — 3 min read

Winchester Community Music School Executive Director Laurie Russell, left, with families and supporters during a groundbreaking ceremony for a new performance hall. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER COMMUNITY MUSIC SCHOOL

The big events in Winchester Community Music School always t
in Nichols Performance Hall. With the school and its performances'

Subscribe

growing in popularity, the hall and many of its amenities are due for an upgrade.

The performance hall is one of the main areas that the school seeks to enhance by fall as part of its SoundBreaking campaign, which aims to provide students with better music technology and renovate the building.

The performance hall is especially important to the school, as it hosts more than 150 concerts with around 5,500 to 6,000 audience members in attendance throughout the year.

Dianne Carboni, a 40-year-old adult learner at the school, recalled the Broadway on Highland performance drawing a big crowd. Even with every chair being filled, some people had to watch from the hallway.

“It was nice because everyone was there to appreciate it,” Carboni said. “But, at the same time, it was funny because [the crowds] are getting bigger. More people want to come.”

Renovations to the hall will include more seats; the new hall will have 135 seats, compared to the 80 seats in the original. It will also have improved acoustics, recording and livestreaming capabilities, and a design centering on ensemble performances.

Subscribe

A rendering of the brand new concert hall at the Winchester Community Music School from the stage. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER COMMUNITY MUSIC SCHOOL

Other expansions to the building will include dedicated studios for ensemble, percussion and private lessons. The building will have ADA-compliant upgrades.

The vision for the expansion started in 2012 when student families and donors described the need for a larger performance space.

The expansion will cost $5.7 million, and the school has reached 62% of its funding goal.

Laurie Russell, the school's executive director, said the funding comes from individual donations and grants.

Even with the renovations, students will continue to learn in its facilities. The company doing the renovations, Burke Property Services, and school officials are coordinating on which areas are placed under construction and which will remain open.

Subscribe

Donate today!

Growing with the community

The nonprofit Winchester Community Music School has grown steadily since its inception in the 1980s as a program created by Corie Nichols and Sandy Thompson and run out of McCall Middle School.

At first, the program had 30 students and three teachers. Now, the school, housed at 407 Highland Ave., has over 1,100 students and 60 teachers.

The school provides lessons and ensembles to students and adult learners. Some of the adults have joined after seeing the success and enjoyment their children had from taking lessons there.

Garrett Nagle, 58, started taking lessons after seeing how one of the instructors, James Doran, interacted with his youngest son, Cameron, during lessons and performances. While Nagle had dabbled in the guitar before, he said the school let him fully embrace his musical passion.

“Jim just kind of brought me to another level,” Nagle said.

Students, particularly adult learners, are drawn to the school’s community and the ability to perform in various ensembles and bands.

Subscribe

Winchester Community Music School faculty, staff and students with the renderings of the new lobby and performance hall space. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER COMMUNITY MUSIC SCHOOL

Andrew McCullough, a 74-year-old retired physician, is part of a few bands at the school. Though McCullough's background in music goes back to his childhood, he's only started playing violin and clarinet in the past few years. Now he's formed a clarinet quartet.

"It's fun when you make music together," McCullough said.

McCullough said he is happy he gets to show younger students that music doesn't have to end when their parents stop paying for lessons.

"It's a huge benefit to the community to be able to have a space where people can get together, adults and kids," he said. "Kids can see adults playing music and say, gee whiz, there's something to playing the violin."

Subscribe

The expansion plan has given students and their families something to look forward to.

Russell recalled being in the lobby, watching a father and daughter planning out their new routes to class and where their performances would take place. The two were “grinning ear to ear,” Russell said.

“It was just so fabulous to see that the families are super excited about what this means for them,” she said.

Tavishi Chattopadhyay is a journalism student at Boston University. This story is part of a partnership between Winchester News and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

Winchester News is a non-profit organization supported by our community. If you appreciate having local Winchester news, please donate to support our work, and subscribe to our free weekly newsletter. Copyright 2026 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with written permission only.

Related

FEATURES

Subscribe

FEATURES

Girls Leading Change working to promote health, empowerment in Winchester and beyond

Executive Director of the Network for Social Justice: March is Women's History Month a time to recognize the incredible contributions of women to history. To mark the occasion, young women from an array of local organizations participated in "Girls Leading Change: Promoting Health and Empowerment," an event held at

SUMMER KIM | CONTRIBUTOR
March 24, 2026

Residents take the 'Plunge' to support Swim Winchester pool project

The wind almost carried the tent away during registration, and the rain picked up just as swimmers splashed into the water at Shannon Beach on Upper Mystic Lake Sunday afternoon for the second Swim Winchester Polar Plunge. Organized by Swim Winchester, the March 22 event at the Mystic Lakes drew

WENDALL WATERS | CORRESPONDENT and
XIYUE ERIC HAN | CORRESPONDENT
March 23, 2026

FEATURES

Oh, what a trivial night! WFEE bee was a load of fun!

I feel the need to apologize to the Teletubbees seated at our table during WFEE's recent Trivia Bee. I was one of the Winchester Newshounds, Round 5, losers. Reporter Will Dowd and editor Nell Escobar Coakley were my teammates and Will taunted those poor high school girls like it

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT
March 18, 2026

FEATURES

Winchester Troop 507 celebrates milestone, honoring first female Eagle Scouts

Dozens filled the hall — proud Scouts, families and friends — cheering on a historical milestone in local scouting. Troop 507, under Scoutmaster Mann Shoffner, proved once again that the rank of Eagle Scout is more than just a collection of badges — it's a testament to nonstop leadership and dedication. In

XIYUE ERIC HAN | CORRESPONDENT
March 17, 2026

Subscribe

Latest

NEWS

Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

NEIL ZOLOT | CORRESPONDENT

March 26, 2026

NEWS

John Bellaire, 22, among youngest townwide winners in Winchester history

He won all eight precincts after a door-to-door campaign that emphasized direct voter contact over institutional backing.

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 25, 2026

EVENTS

EVENTS

Subscribe

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

March 25, 2026

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

March 25, 2026

WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Subscribe to Winchester News

© 2026 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with permission for non-commercial use only.

Subscribe